

FOIAB3B

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The State Department Gag Rule

It is a strange world, this world of internal security, and nowhere stranger than in the Department of State.

A suspended security officer, Otto Otepka, has been ordered not to testify before Congress on anything concerning Secretary of State Rusk's dogged determination to fire him. Other prospective witnesses from the State Department were summoned to its legal division and instructed, on pain of losing their jobs, to give no testimony in Congress on the Otepka case.

Mr. Otepka is persona non grata in the Department he has served for many years for telling the truth to the Internal Security subcommittee of the Senate on laxness in State Department security procedures. Some kind of a hearing procedure is under way in the department on Mr. Otepka's administrative sins, which consist largely in supplying the Senate Committee with three documents to prove that he was telling the truth and that one of his superiors lied.

But Secretary Rusk feels that he can't maintain much order around the State Department if subordinate officials are to run up to Capitol Hill freely with classified documents and blab all they know. The Internal Security committee isn't as much interested in the niceties of administrative procedure as in showing that, under Mr. Rusk, security control practices have become indefensibly soft in a reaction from the McCarthy era that has been carried too far.

Mr. Rusk's own reaction to this criticism has been rather unlike him. His actions in the Otepka case, particularly the recent gag, have been labelled

lican congressmen as "fascist" and "dictatorial."

Along with the Otepka gag, it also develops that one William Wieland, former Latin-American expert whose reports on Fidel Castro were deemed by Mr. Otepka to be misleading, may be cleared of any onus for these reports. As one-time chief security evaluator of the department, Mr. Otepka ruled that Mr. Wieland should be ousted. But Mr. Rusk's office thought otherwise and prepared to reassign Mr. Wieland to a sensitive spot in Germany when FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover intervened with advice to the contrary. Thereupon Mr. Wieland was given a job shuffling papers in Washington.

The complaint against Mr. Wieland was that although voluminous reports were made in the late 1950s on Castro's Communist connections, these reports got lost in the Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs which Mr. Wieland headed. President Eisenhower, it is reported, accidentally found out at a White House social event that there was some doubt about Mr. Castro as a liberal people's leader, and his inquiries on this point disclosed that FBI Director Hoover's reports hadn't gotten through to the highest levels, which is not without precedent.

Last March other security officials—not Mr. Otepka, this time, for he had been shelved for six months—took up the Wieland case again. They claimed Mr. Wieland hadn't told the full story on his contacts with Mr. Castro and therefore should be dropped for lack of frankness. Two of the men who made these new recommendations were

the State Department security division. A special three-man panel of persons outside the department was named to consider the Wieland case. Their findings have now gone to Mr. Rusk and it is entirely up to him to reinstate Mr. Wieland to full standing as a foreign service officer, or fire him.

Now, in all this wheel-within-wheels business there is fine material for the presidential campaign. For, if Mr. Rusk gets rid of Mr. Otepka and reinstates Mr. Wieland, this will be hailed by the Republican opposition as final proof that the department is populated by soft-heads who are dupes and patsies for the kind of pseudo-liberalism sometimes affected by incipient or real Communists.

So it is a hard decision, fraught with political dangers for Mr. Rusk in a presidential campaign wherein a leading issue is co-existence with the Communist world or getting tougher and harder to push around.

But, however he decides the Otepka and Wieland issues, the cold war as fought out in Foggy Bottom is like the cold war everywhere. It is unpleasant, and the good guys play dirty just like the bad guys. Mr. Otepka has had his share for co-operating with the Senate committee—tapped telephone, ostracism, the new gag rule.

It is the old story. If you are a Government employee and see things going wrong, forget it and always, always go by the book. We can stand a little of this where plain old-fashioned venality is involved. But we can't stand very much when the issue is the judgment, frankness and reliability of men influencing or

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